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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000527

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SUBJECT: Update on Niger's Political Situation

Ref: a) Niamey 00521, b) Niamey 00479

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Political tensions remain, with anti-Tazarcists breaking up a civil society conference for the public in Zinder; organizers, however, vow to continue their campaign against the August 4 referendum. The Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the nation's main opposition party, held its fifth convention, at which the party re-elected Mahamadou Issoufou as its president and continued its criticism of President Tandja's plan to hold a referendum to extend his term in office. Issoufou castigated the use of spoils from the uranium sector and announced the formation of a new opposition consortium, the "Coordination of Forces for Democracy and Republic." Meanwhile, the Social Democratic Convention (CDS) and the Nigerien Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP) announced the withdrawal of their political appointees in regions, districts, and administrative posts. Compliance with this decision, however, remains to be seen. End summary.

Anti-Tazarce Activists Face Intolerance in Zinder

¶2. (SBU) On July 17, the United Front for the Safeguarding of Democratic Gains (FUSAD), an umbrella group of civil society organizations opposed to the Tazarce plan, visited the city of Zinder to hold a public conference on the stakes of the president's referendum project. According to media reports, when the conference was about to start, a group of youth swarmed the auditorium shouting Tazarce slogans to intimidate the audience and conference organizers. As a consequence, the conference was delayed. The leader of the youth who disrupted the conference said, "These people came to discredit the government and to flout the institutions of the Republic. We will not allow that. We support the president. Zinder supports Tazarce." In a subsequent press conference, Marou Amadou, leader of FUSAD, accused regional GON officials of fomenting the attack and said that his organization would lodge a complaint. Political observers in Zinder advised Embassy staff that a local businessman supporting Tazarce had sent hooligans from his home village of Koleram to disturb the conference.

Fifth PNDS Convention: A Vow to Fight for Democracy

¶3. (SBU) On July 18, the Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), Niger's main opposition party, held its fifth convention to overhaul the party's bylaws, renew its leadership, and determine new policies. The convention re-elected Mahamadou Issoufou as the party's leader. During his opening remarks, Issoufou raised several issues relating to Niger's current political situation. Excerpts

follow:

¶A. "The fifth convention opens in a context of political crisis the only cause of which is the defense of personal interests to the detriment of the common interest. Today, those who want to assess the disastrous effects on a country of greed, selfishness, and a lack of scruples, to the service of megalomania - let them visit Mamadou Tandja's Niger."

¶B. "In fact, while our country has experienced ten years of stability, the latter, democratically elected twice, has decided to stage a coup d'etat to remain in power under the fallacious pretext of not having found a Nigerien worthy of succeeding him and capable to complete his so-called construction projects."

¶C. "Corruption has plagued the uranium sector, where the allocation of exploration permits was used by some well identified individuals who pocketed well known commissions... the marketing of uranium constitutes another evidence of the business fever that caught the regime...corruption...has (also) pervaded all sectors of public service, from the messenger to the minister. Venality hits all public acts."

¶D. Citing several violations of the constitution by President Tandja, Issoufou praised the creation of a new "Coordination of Forces for Democracy and Republic" - (CFDR), and asserted the PNDS' resolve to defend democratic principles. He stated that "Mr. Tandja is solely responsible for the twofold economic and political crisis in which our country will find itself. That is why we are determined to oppose his coup d'etat; we are determined to prevent his illegal referendum of August 4, by virtue of Articles 13, 29, and 115 of the Constitution."

CDS, ANDP Withdraw More Members from Government

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¶4. (SBU) On July 19, the Social Democratic Convention (CDS) and the Nigerien Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP) made a joint statement in which they announced the withdrawal of all governors, prefets (district administrator), and "chef de poste" (local administrator) from government. The two parties said they did not want their members to continue supporting the campaign for a referendum the FDD decided to boycott (ref A). CDS has two governors (Agadez and Maradi) and several prefets and chefs de poste; ANDP has one governor (Diffa) and several district level officials. This decision follows the dismissal of three ANDP ministers from the cabinet on May 14, and the CDS decision to withdraw eight of its ministers from government (ref B).

Comment

¶5. (SBU) It remains to be seen if governors Abba Malam Boukar (Agadez) and Oumarou Yacouba (Diffa) will resign from their positions. The former comes from the same region as President Tandja (Diffa), while the latter has been governor of Diffa for several years. There were also rumors that governors throughout the country had received substantial amounts of money to stage "popular support" for President Tandja, run the referendum campaign, and serve as a "personal incentive." In addition, these two regions have large ongoing mining projects (uranium and oil). End comment.

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